



**Capital
Insurrection
and Art**

Capital, Insurrection, and Art

The economic magicians of capitalism want us to believe their system is universal. They've developed massive think tanks devoted to the myth that capital always has been and always will be. The economists' spell applies the logic of capital and the market to every aspect of human interaction in every historical period. Within their abstract models this logic seems to work, but when we strip the abstractions away, both from their definition of the market and from any particular historical situation (including present situations) we will often see their logic fail.

I fear that today's radicals and insurrectionals have been trapped inside these spells. Requiring total destruction buys into the neoliberal myth of capitalism as pervasive and monolithic. Objecting to all counter-institutions or constructive practices forgets that communism is possible at any moment.

Yes, the insurrection is coming. Yes, the collapse is here. Yes, living within this collapse requires carving out a space, a situation of exception. Yes, an insurrection might create a violent rupture that temporarily opens such a space. But, if we believe the neoliberal myth that all value is capital, all flows are the market, and all production is labor, these ruptures will suffer an existential crisis and automatically close. We need new economic models to sustain exceptional situations.

The monolithic definition of capital combined with our passionate desire to abolish capital creates a theoretical project requiring the abolition of all society, all community, all flows of value and all material existence. These nihilistic projects might be ethically abhorrent or philosophically objectionable, if they weren't first and foremost laughably impractical. If the idea is to tear down the capitalist superstructure, and then quash any counter-revolutionary socializing tendencies, and then tear down every single local community that springs up in the void we've created¹, that's a dream on top of a dream, on top of a dream. I not interested in dreaming. If I were, I'd be a hippy.

Each of those dreams (like all utopian projects) is an entirely political project. They might not be electoral or reformist projects, but they are nonetheless entirely political. If war is the pursuit of politics by other means, then social war is merely activism by other means. But "politics is part of the desert" and "activism only prolongs the catastrophe". Revolutionaries must withdraw from politics altogether.

NOTES:

1. see eaustreum's Communisation vs Socialisation at summercamp2009.ednnotes.org.uk/node/32 for an example. I might agree that revolution as communization by the proletariat does require elimination of all these forms of potential counter-revolution, but this only underscores the absurdity of such a project.
2. Above quotes are from The Call, also: "The economy, the economic sphere, ensues logically: as a necessary and impossible management of all that was left at the door of the assembly, of all that was constituted, thus as non-political."
3. eaustreum again.
4. Politics is not a Banana, p.120, and back cover.
5. More from The Call.
6. Please hold your new agey theoretical physics or quantum subjectivity claims.
7. Or dominant yet hidden... or laboriously described yet unchanging ... or all three depending on where in society you stand.
8. The clichéd adage from Ghandi remains true whether we want it to be or not. We are the change we want to see in the world.
9. Efficiency here means creating value with lowest costs. Recuperation almost always destroys value, so to say capitalism is more efficient is absurd.
10. Initially, recuperation involves the small concessions to environmentalism, labor or human rights necessary to appease the reformist demands. These are not always entirely insignificant concessions (especially to the people making demands) but they are clearly uninteresting to those of us with more radical ambitions. Very well, the second benefit of recuperation is more useful to us.
11. Yes, the most convenient exchange value is often capitalism's universal constant (cash). But economic revolutions proceed piecemeal. Currency (like government) is a superstructure that follows from these base relations. When radically new base relations dominate they demand and create a radically new forms of currency (or politics). Yes, you can say you want no currency or no politics, but you can only want these things in theory, not in practice. Simply removing the capitalist superstructure will only open a space for a socialist, fascist, or perhaps even feudal superstructure and economy. We're familiar with these foul things, and want something new, don't we?
12. PNB p. 167
13. As described in The Coming Insurrection p.69.
14. Actually, the art world seems to be more of a retarded pre-capitalist patronage hell. I don't know. Whatever's going on there, it's fucking gross.
15. Even the famous pessimist Theodor Adorno held out hope for corrosive unacceptability in music.
16. Besides, it's pretty clear the vortex is populated by fascists, socialists, and tribal warlords just aching to fuck some biopower.

art world is the worst kind of commodity hell.¹⁴ Yes, punk rock has clearly been recuperated. Yes, creating any value requires constantly beating off hipsters and other capitalist vultures.

But, why don't we stop getting pissy about capitalism recuperating what it clearly can recuperate and instead focus on bolstering what it maybe can't? Let the vultures have black denim and studded leather jackets and three chord songs, 1977 belongs in the society for creative anachronism anyway. Capitalism might be able to take power electronics and noise as well¹⁵ but they simply can't take DIY because DIY is an attribute of the production, not of the product. Let Whole Foods have "organic" and "green". Lets see if they choke on trying to swallow market share around "locally grown" or "worker owned". If they don't, if they manage to con workers into "profit sharing" and buy more from local farmers, we lose nothing and a giant corporation becomes a little more decentralized. Then we go further, because decentralizing corporations isn't our goal. We let them have those things and focus on victory gardens, craftivism, potlucks, secret cafes and really really free markets. Bend the fuckers until they break.

If we recognize whatever shreds of remaining humanity there are in the desert of capital, throw our energy behind the instances of vulnerability, expose every hip faker, and build an intentional economy in the small gaps and ruptures, capital will chase us. That's a good thing. They'll follow us down whatever rabbit hole we lead them into, anywhere they think they see a market share. We don't know what'll happen in these tunnels, but we know more than we do about the insurrectionary vortex.¹⁶ We know our rabbit hole narrows, and eventually gets too small for anything built to capitalize on economies of scale. Capitalists might get stuck and let us live safe further down the tunnel. Or, they might break into smaller pieces to continue their pursuit. These pieces might be small enough to fight, struggle against and live amongst. But, if they're still too big for us, we can choose to bring the ceiling down, suffocate and be done with civilization entirely.

We can speculate about how far down the tunnel we might want to go, argue socialism v communism v primitivism, but these arguments are entirely theoretical until we get there, and I don't see anyone else outlining much of a useful path. Running down the rabbit hole give us not only somewhere to live but also a direction to move. It outlines a process we can sustain, alongside and mutually reinforcing the increasingly frequent, but all too temporary, insurrectionary ruptures.

When we withdraw from politics, we're left with economics². But, we've allowed the neoliberal magicians to define and control all things economic. They spread their magic model out over the landscape before any of us were born and constantly update it. We've lived our entire lives under the assumption that the flow of capital encompasses all flows of value, "whether it employs money, any kind of voucher, or even simple barter"³. Their model has covered the landscape long enough to shape it, but we can still tear a hole in this model, draw ours in and find the landscape anew.

If we reject the neoliberal myth and define capital precisely and meaningfully, we will understand capitalism as a particular economic system. We can then easily imagine and practice things that are not-capitalism. These are things that by definition cannot be recuperated.

Yes, capital yearns to recuperate everything. Yes, every attempt to create identity, autonomy, or value within a community of resistance is subject to this recuperation. Yes, recuperating the very idea of "resistance" is itself a constant often successful project of capital. Yes, capital "recomposes people into its own substance and incarnates itself". Yes, this makes modern life hell and yes it is a shame we still have air to breathe in hell.⁴ I'm not interested in shame. We're still breathing and if we do not give up breathing, then we must decide how we're going to live in hell.

We can chose to live haphazardly, which is exactly how the managers of crisis want us to live, or we can strive to live intentionally. We can build the party, form our sensibilities into a force, but to manifest and sustain that force, to prop it up in the ruptures of capitalism, we need our own productive economy.

I realize this is not what anyone wants to hear. I can hear the imprecations against Marxist orthodoxy and materialism already. I absolutely agree that Marxist orthodoxy should be cursed and materialism handled with extreme caution, but it must be handled. Otherwise, we leave it to be defined by neoliberal magicians.

When we look for "relations that are not the relations of production"⁵ we're overlooking the fact that "relations of production" is an idea, a construct, a description of actual relations viewed through a particular lens. When an economist looks at relations they use this lens and describe them as "productive". They can describe anything in these terms (a riot increases the market demand for plate glass, maybe). We could reject this construct,

but that only changes our perception, not the relations themselves. We'd only look at them through a different lens.⁶ If we take away the lens for trying to look at production, economy and materials, we see nothing but theory, ideas, and dreams.

Yes, in our current society the economic lens is overpowering.⁷ Yes, this excessive attention to relations of production does begin to shape the relations themselves, maximizing the benefit for Capital. But, removing the lens is tantamount to being willfully ignorant of the economic or productive dynamics of our relations, to living unintentionally. Thus we put ourselves back where capitalism wants us: shamefully smoking cigarettes, sucking down monster drinks, and creating the occasional crisis to be managed.

The zone of indistinction around creation / destruction works both ways. If I cannot build an alternative economy without destroying capitalism, then you also cannot destroy capitalism without simultaneously building a new economy.⁸ Masked revolutionaries using UPITT students as cannon fodder to absorb the police response is a set of relations that- looked at through the lens of economics, replaces capitalism with confusion, estrangement with anonymity, wage slavery with cynical manipulation, the spectacle with romanticism, and labor with tear gas and a beating. It's no wonder we don't want to look at these relations as relations of production.

There may not be an outside to the global capitalist economy, but if we can rupture the surface of capital, why can't we sustain an interruption in the flow of capital by creating flows of not-capital? This is not amassing dual power. It is not ignoring the creation / destruction zone of indistinction. It is the conscious decentralized and uncontrolled removal of capital from our lived relations by every means available, and it is only possible if we're scrupulously conscious of our relations as relations of production.

Capitalism recuperates market share by mimicking the affects, gestures, attributes and appearances of any valued thing created outside or on the fringes of capitalism. This mimicry, carried out on a large enough scale, eventually replaces the original valued thing. The capitalist mode of production is rarely the most efficient means to reproduce these things, sometimes it is not even the most cost-effective.⁹ Yet, capitalism dominates production because it overlooks value and focuses purely on cost-effectiveness and economies of scale. When this isn't good enough to corner the market in spite of negative value creation, capitalism wields its traditional social status, its political manipulation and its power of The Spectacle to dismantle the competition.

The instances I'm most interested in are the ones where capitalist reproduction is not even cost-effective, because these instances are most vulnerable. If we communize whatever we get a hold of and produce these vulnerabilities, exchanging them under intentionally and overtly non-capitalist relations, we create a post-capitalist economy that can compete with capitalism and potentially overcome its many traditional social and political advantages.

We must experiment with this mode in two ways simultaneously. First, we must develop it by continually reducing or entirely removing capitalist forms and influence from our productive relationships. Second, we can apply it to various situations, identifying vulnerabilities. The fact of capitalist recuperation itself has use.¹⁰ When capitalism recuperates something it demonstrates that this thing can be recuperated, which narrows our focus onto the things which have not been recuperated. If there is anything unrecuperable, this is where we can find it.

If capitalism requires everyone to pay for a seat in the theatre even if half the seats are left empty because it cannot overcome the collective action problem, then we can perform for free and let the audience choose to support us according to how they have determined the show's value. That's a non-capitalist exchange. If we collaborate on something and each of us receives value commensurate to what we determine is the full product of the labor, that's a non-capitalist effort. If we focus on creating phenomenon or objects that are not mechanically reproducible (or reproducible at all) those have the greatest potential for establishing a post-capitalist economy.¹¹

When we talk about friendship as the model of the commune¹² we cannot forget that creation is often a desired and important part of friendship. My most challenging and meaningful friendships have created theatre. Thousands in DIY punk bands can echo this statement. I hear the beehive collective considers their art works a sort of unifying force and the Tarnac 9 ran a DIY space that hosted film screenings. Even the Institute for Experimental Freedom (though they may be ashamed of it) produce Politics is Not a Banana. Perhaps creation is not only a desired part of a civilized passive friendship.¹³ Perhaps it's something that binds us together, challenges us, and deepens our interactions. Creation may be the thing that makes us too loud and too passionate, a necessary part of making some singularities be a commune and not just a clique.

Yes, these things do sound suspiciously like art, and yes, absolutely, the